

CHAPTER 16

Al-Nahl: The Bee

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 16 *sections*; 128 *verses*)

This chapter is very appropriately named *The Bee*, because the bee, guided by instinct, which is called a revelation in its case (verse 68), gathers together sweet honey from flowers of all kinds, taking what is best in them, thus producing “a beverage of many hues, in which there is healing for men”. So Divine revelation to the Holy Prophet collected what was best in the teaching of all the prophets and presented it in the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân, which is also declared to be a healing (10:57) for the spiritual diseases of human beings. The subject-matter of this chapter is the same as that of the preceding six chapters of the *alif lâm râ* group, to which it really forms, as it were, a supplement. The first section announces the approach of the doom, and then shows by reference to the great Divine gifts for the physical welfare of human beings that such a beneficent Master could not have neglected his religious welfare. The second section, still dwelling upon the benefits which Allâh has conferred upon human beings in physical nature, draws attention to human being’s superiority over the whole of creation, which is made subservient to him. The next two sections lead us again into the domain of prophecy by stating that the deniers will come to disgrace. These are followed by two sections further explaining the truth of the statements made above and dealing with some of the false excuses of those who rejected the truth. The seventh section shows how human nature revolts against polytheism, and the eighth deals with the iniquities of the deniers, which, however, a Merciful Allâh is slow to punish. The ninth establishes the necessity of revelation by reference to the working of law in nature, and the tenth shows that all human beings cannot be the recipients of that revelation, but that choice is made of the best. The eleventh speaks of the hour when the opponents will be overthrown, though the punishment is delayed out of Divine mercy. The twelfth refers to the evidence of prophets against their people. The thirteenth shows that it is nothing but good that is enjoined by revelation, and thus appeals to human instinct not to reject it. The Qur’ân is next plainly stated to be a revelation in substitution for the previous revelation. The fate of the opponents who persist in rejecting the Truth is then compared with that of a flourishing town, which is

made to suffer fear and hunger because of the ingratitude of its people. The chapter is closed by giving the Muslims certain directions, which they must follow in order to become, and to remain, a great nation.

The revelation of this chapter belongs to the last Makkan period, like that of the group which it supplements. The mention, in verses 41 and 110, of Muhâjirs, i.e. those who fly from their home, has led some to think that these verses must have been revealed at Madînah. It should, however, be noted that the first flight of the Muslims to escape the severe persecution of the Makkans had taken place as early as the fifth year of the Call; but it is more probable that the reference is to the second Muslim exodus from Makkah, which took place before the Holy Prophet's actual departure from that town.

SECTION 1: Revelation testified to by Nature

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 Allâh's commandment will come to pass, so seek not to hasten it.^a Glory be to Him, and highly exalted be He above what they associate (with Him)!

2 He sends down *malâ'ikah* with revelation^a by His command on whom He pleases of His servants, saying: Give the warning that there is no Deity but Me, so keep your duty to Me.

3 He created the *samâwât* and the earth with truth. Highly exalted be He above what they associate (with Him)!

4 He created human beings from a small *Nutfah*,^a and lo! He or she is an open contender.

5 And the cattle, He has created them for you. You have in them warm clothing and (other) advantages, and of them you eat.

6 And therein is beauty for you, when you drive them back (home) and when you send them out (to pasture).

7 And they carry your heavy loads to regions which you could not reach but with distress to yourselves. Surely your *Rabb* is Compassionate, Merciful.

1a. The first words of this chapter are a fitting sequel to the previous chapters, which repeatedly give warning of punishment to the opponents of the Truth. The *amr Allâh*

(lit., *Allâh's commandment*) signifies the threatened punishment. The disbelievers are asked not to hasten the punishment, for Allâh, Who conferred so many physical benefits on them, is willing to bestow His religious gifts, as mercy has the foremost place in Divine nature. This is stated in the verses that follow. What that punishment was going to be is expressly stated at the end of this chapter (verse 112); see 112a.

2a. *Rûh* here signifies *Divine revelation*, so called because it quickens to religious life. It also signifies the Qur'ân (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

4a. *Nutfah* signifies originally only *pure water* — *al-mâ' al-ṣâfî* — the word being applied to a very small quantity as well as to a very large volume of it, so that any good drink is called a *nutfah*, so also is a sea (*Tâj al-'Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faid Murtaḍâ*). The *nutfah* from which man is stated to be created is the small life-germ, or the spermatozoon, in the seminal fluid.

8 And (He made) horses and mules and asses that you might ride upon them and as an ornament. And He creates what you know not.

9 And upon Allâh it rests to show the right way, and there are some deviating (ways). And if He please, He would guide you all aright.^a

SECTION 2: Nature upholds Unity

10 He it is Who sends down water from the clouds for you; it gives drink, and by it (grow) the trees on which you feed.

11 He causes to grow for you thereby herbage, and the olives, and the date-palms, and the grapes, and all the fruits. Surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect.

12 And He has made subservient for you the night and the day and the sun and the moon. And the stars are made subservient by His command. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand.

13 And what He has created for you in the earth is of varied hues. Surely there is a sign in this for a people who are mindful.

14 And He it is Who has made the sea subservient that you may eat fresh flesh from it and bring forth from it ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships cleaving through it, so that you seek of His bounty and that you may give thanks.

9a. And so at last it was that at first Makkah and then the whole of Arabia accepted Islâm.

15 And He has cast firm mountains in the earth lest it quake with you, and rivers and roads that you may go aright,^a

16 And landmarks. And by the stars they find the right way.

17 Is He then Who creates like him who creates not? Do you not then mind?

18 And if you would count Allâh's favours, you would not be able to number them. Surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

19 And Allâh knows what you conceal and what you do openly.

20 And those whom they call on besides Allâh created naught, while they are themselves created.

21 Dead (are they) not living. And they know not when they will be raised.^a

15a. The words of the Qur'ân seem to point to the great upheavals and the violent agitations which led to the formation of the mountains, before man's existence on earth, and, that having been effected, the convulsions are now comparatively insignificant. The present condition of the earth, with man upon it, is therefore one of stability, making life possible. But *an tamîda bi-kum* may also mean that *they may be a source of benefit to you* as *mâda* means *he conferred a benefit*. In accordance with this we have elsewhere: "And the mountains, He made them firm, a provision for you and for your cattle" (79:32, 33).

21a. These two verses show conclusively that neither "Jesus Christ" nor any other person who is taken for a deity ever created anything; and secondly, that 'Îsâ was not alive at the time of the revelation of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân: *Dead are they, not living*. The further statement that they do not even know when they will be raised shows that the verse speaks of men taken for deities, and at any rate includes them.

SECTION 3: Denial due to Ignorance

22 Your Deity is one Deity: so those who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts refuse to know and they are proud.

23 Undoubtedly Allâh knows what they hide and what they manifest. Surely He loves not the proud.

24 And when it is said to them, What is it that your *Rabb* has revealed? they say, Stories of the ancients!

25 That they may bear their burdens in full on the day of Resurrection, and also of the burdens of those whom they lead astray without knowledge. Ah! evil is what they bear.

SECTION 4: The Wicked will come to Disgrace

26 Those before them plotted, so Allâh demolished their building from the foundations, so the roof fell down on them from above them, and the chastisement came to them from whence they perceived not.^a

27 Then on the Resurrection day He will bring them to disgrace and say: Where are My partners, for whose sake you became hostile? Those who are given the knowledge will say: Surely disgrace this day and evil are upon the disbelievers,^a

26a. The meaning is that the opponents will be given time to complete their plans, and then these plans and all that they spent on them will be brought to naught, and prove a cause of their own ruin. Compare 8:36 “Surely those who disbelieve spend their wealth to hinder people from the way of Allâh. So they will go on spending it, then it will be to them regret, and then they will be overcome”.

28 Whom the *malâ'ikah* cause to die, while they are unjust to themselves. Then would they offer submission: We did not do any evil. Nay! Surely Allâh knows what you did.

29 So enter the gates of hell, to abide therein. Evil indeed is the dwelling- place of the proud.

30 And it is said to those who guard against evil: What has your *Rabb* revealed? They say, Good. For those who do good in this world is good. And certainly the abode of the Hereafter is better. And excellent indeed is the abode of those who keep their duty

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31 Gardens of perpetuity which they enter, wherein flow rivers: they have therein what they please. Thus does Allâh reward those who keep their duty,

32 Whom the angels cause to die in purity, saying: Peace be to you! Enter the Garden for what you did.

33 Await they aught but that the *malâ'ikah* should come to them or that your *Rabb's* command should come to pass.^a Thus did those before them. And Allâh wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.

27a. Mark that the punishment of the disbelievers on the Resurrection day is described twice in this verse as *disgrace*. This shows that *disgrace* is a sort of hell-fire, which they had in this very life, too.

33a. What is meant by the coming of the *malâ'ikah* or the coming of the *Rabb* is made clear by the next verse; it is the punishment for their evil deeds and ultimately their complete overthrow that is meant. The coming of the *malâ'ikah* stands for the smaller afflictions, such as overtook them in the form of famine and war, while the coming to pass of the command of the *Rabb* indicates the complete overthrow of their power. Compare 2:210, 210a.

34 So the evil of what they did afflicted them, and that which they mocked encompassed them.^a

SECTION 5: Prophets are raised to explain

35 And the idolaters say: If Allâh pleased we would not have served aught but Him, (neither) we nor our fathers, nor would we have prohibited aught without (order from) Him.^a Thus did those before them. But have the messengers any duty except a plain delivery (of the message)?

36 And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger, saying: Serve Allâh and shun the *Taghût*. Then of them was he whom Allâh guided, and of them was he whose remaining in error was justly due.^a So travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejectors.

37 If thou desirest their guidance, yet Allâh will not guide him who leads astray,^a nor have they any helpers.

34a. The past tense is used to express the highest degree of certainty relating to the future.

35a. They would not give a serious thought to the Prophet's message that evil works bring an evil consequence, but met it with the rejoinder that, if Allâh did not like evil,

He could have diverted them from evil ways. They are told in reply that Allâh's pleasure is not exercised by compelling people to adopt one way or the other, but by sending His messengers in every age and to every nation to point out the right way to the people, and by clear messages through the mouths of His ministers to warn people to avoid evil.

36a. *Haqqa* 'alai-hi means *a thing was suitable to the requirements of justice, etc., to take effect upon him* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). There were some people who did not care for the Prophet's warning and adhered to error. Justice therefore required that they should be left in error. The message was sent by Allâh; the choice was man's own to accept or reject it. The words do not mean that Allâh had foredoomed some people, for then the sending to them of messengers would have been absurd. For meaning of the term *Taghût* see chapter 2, footnote 256b.

37a. I think there has been a great misunderstanding in the interpretation of the words *man yudillu*, which clearly mean who *leads* (others) *astray*. The meaning is, therefore, that those who do not only walk in error themselves, but have grown so hostile to the cause of Truth that they mislead others, cannot find the right way, however much the Prophet may be anxious for them.

38 And they swear by Allâh their most energetic oaths: Allâh will not raise up him who dies. Yea! it is a promise binding on Him, quite true, but most people know not:

39 So that He might make manifest to them that about which they differ, and that those who disbelieve might know that they were liars.

40 Our word for a thing, when We intend it, is only that We say to it, Be; and it is.

SECTION 6: **Doom of Opponents is coming**

41 And those who flee for Allâh's sake after they are oppressed, We shall certainly give them a good abode in the world; and the reward of the Hereafter is much greater. Did they but know!^a

42 Those who are steadfast and on their *Rabb* they rely.

43 And We sent not before you any but men to whom We sent revelation — so ask the followers of the Reminder if you know not^a—

41a. Here is a clear prophecy regarding those Muslims who had to flee their homes on account of the persecutions of the Quraish. What is promised them is not only a reward of the Hereafter but *a goodly abode in this world, too*. Whether the reference here is only to the earlier flights to Abyssinia, or to the later flight to Madînah, which had begun before the Holy Prophet's departure, one thing is certain: those who fled their homes in utter helplessness, and were in danger even of their very lives, were given the clearest promise of a great future in this life, and this promise proved true notwithstanding the hard struggle of a powerful nation, united at least in the determination to exterminate Islâm. It is related of the Caliph 'Umar that he used to say, when he gave a gift to one of the emigrants: "Take this — may Allâh bless you! This is what He promised you in this life, and what is for you in the Hereafter is greater" (*Kashshâf* (Commentary), by Abu-l-Qâsim Mahmûd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharî), evidently referring to this verse.

43a. By the followers of the *Reminder* are generally understood the Jews and the Christians, to whom it is supposed the Quraish are told to refer the question whether it is or it is not true that only men and not angels were sent with Divine revelation before, but the mention in the very next verse of the *Dhikr*, or the *Reminder*, being sent to the Holy Prophet shows that the words apply to the Muslims. Some commentators, however, take the words generally as meaning learned men.

44 With clear arguments and Scriptures. And We have revealed to thee the Reminder that thou mayest make clear to men that which has been revealed to them, and that haply they may reflect.

45 Are they, then, who plan evil (plans), secure that Allâh will not abase them in the earth,^a or that chastisement will not overtake them from whence they perceive not?

46 Or that He will not seize them in their going to and fro,^a then they will not be able to escape?

47 Or that He will not seize them with a gradual diminution?^a Your *Rabb* is surely Compassionate, Merciful.

48 See they not everything that Allâh has created? Its (very) shadows return from right and left, making obeisance to Allâh, while they are in utter abasement.

45a. *Khasf*, which is ordinarily rendered as *cleaving open*, or *swallowing*, also means *idhlâl* (T), i.e. *bringing to disgrace*. *Khasafa* also signifies *it became defective*, or

suffered loss, and the infinitive noun *khasf* signifies *being vile, abject, or contemptible, or lowering, abasing, or humbling another* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

46a. *Taqallub* (lit., *turning about*) signifies *journeying for traffic, because for this purpose one has to go and come again and again* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Verses 45– 47 are prophetic. As verses 41, 42 speak of a prosperous future for those who accepted the truth and now were suffering the severest persecutions, these three verses speak of the different forms of punishment to which the persecutors of the righteous were to be subjected. Verse 45 foretells that abasement in the land is in store for them, while in verse 46 they are told that their very journeys to Syria, on which their prosperity depended on account of the trade which was thus kept up, might come to an end. This happened when the Muslims at Madînah became strong and, due to the hostile attitude of the Makkans, who attacked them again and again, became a threat to their Syrian trade, as Madînah was situated on the trade route.

47a. *Takhawwafa-hû* means *he took little by little from it* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), and the meaning is that they will be diminished gradually, until disbelief was utterly annihilated. This was their end; their power went on waning till the whole of Arabia bowed before Islâm.

49 And to Allâh makes obeisance every living creature that is in the *samâwât* and that is in the earth, and the *malâ'ikah* (too) and they are not proud.

50 They fear their *Rabb* above them and do what they are commanded.^a

Prostration

SECTION 7: Human Nature revolts against Polytheism

51 And Allâh has said: Take not two deities. He is only one Deity: So Me alone should you fear.

52 And whatever is in the *samâwât* and the earth is His, and to Him is obedience due always. Will you then fear other than Allâh?

53 And whatever good you have, it is from Allâh; then, when evil afflicts you, to Him do you cry for aid.

54 Then when He removes the evil from you, lo! Some of you associate others with their *Rabb*,

55 So as to deny what We have given them. Then enjoy yourselves, for soon will you know.

56 And they set apart for what they know not,^a a portion of what We have given them. By Allâh! you shall certainly be questioned about that which you forged.

57 And they ascribe daughters to Allâh. Glory be to Him! And for them is what they desire!

50a. The recital of this verse is followed by an actual prostration; see 7:206a.

56a. That is, for the idols or their deities, whom they ignorantly take for intercessors.

58 And when the birth of a daughter is announced to one of them, his face becomes black and he is full of wrath.

59 He hides himself from the people because of the evil of what is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge!^a

60 For those who believe not in the Hereafter are evil attributes and Allâh's are the sublime attributes. And He is the Mighty, the Wise.

SECTION 8: Iniquity of Deniers

61 And if Allâh were to destroy men for their iniquity, He would not leave therein a single creature, but He respites them till an appointed time. So when their doom comes, they are not able to delay (it) an hour, nor can they advance (it).

62 And they ascribe to Allâh what they (themselves) hate,^a and their tongues relate the lie that for them is good. Assuredly for them is the Fire, and they will be (therein) abandoned.

63 By Allâh! We certainly sent (messengers) to nations before thee, but the *shaitân* made their deeds fair-seeming to them. So he is their patron today, and for them is a painful chastisement.

59a. The allusion is to the barbarous custom of burying daughters alive, which was prevalent among the Arabs, especially among their chiefs. Its abolition was one of the

numerous blessings of Islâm. With no physical or administrative power behind it to ensure its enforcement, the word of Allâh swept away this deep-rooted custom as if by a magician's wand, so that not a single case of the burial of a living girl ever occurred after the mandate came. Attention is drawn to the inconsistency of their avowed beliefs with their inward convictions in verse 62; see 62*a*.

62*a*. The reference is to their ascribing daughters to Allâh, while they themselves did not like to have a daughter, thus showing how obviously inconsistent with their inward convictions was their professed belief in the Divine Being.

64 And We have not revealed to you the Book except that you may make clear to them that wherein they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.^a

65 And Allâh sends down water from above, and therewith gives life to the earth after its death.^a Surely there is a sign in this for a people who listen.

SECTION 9: Parables showing the Truth of Revelation

66 And surely there is a lesson for you in the cattle: We give you to drink of what is in their bellies — from betwixt the faeces and the blood — pure milk, agreeable to the drinkers.

67 And of the fruits of the palms and the grapes, you obtain from them intoxicants and goodly provision. There is surely a sign in this for a people who ponder.^a

64*a*. The previous verse shows that the whole world was in the grip of the *shaitân* at the advent of the Prophet. It speaks of messengers having been sent to all nations before the coming of the Prophet, but adds that, as time passed, the followers of the messengers, instead of following their teachings, followed evil ways, which gradually appeared to them so beautiful that the good of this world was all in all for them. This verse shows that the teachings of the previous prophets had been distorted to such an extent that a new Prophet was now needed to lead them aright. Truth had been obscured to such an extent that it could not now be discovered without light from heaven. It also establishes that the new Prophet's message was for the followers of all religions; in other words, for the whole world.

65a. The water from *samâ'* is the Divine revelation, the death of the earth is its corruption, and the giving of life signifies its religious awakening, marvellous signs of which had already appeared in Arabia.

67a. This and the previous verse seem to aim at a comparison between the Divine laws as manifested in nature and the handiwork of human beings. It is the working of Divine law in nature that produces such a valuable and agreeable diet as pure milk, separating it from the other elements — blood and dung — to which food is reduced in the belly of a cow, a goat, or other animal, which the hand of human beings is unable to do. On the other hand, the most agreeable provisions produced by nature in the form of fruits are turned into such a poisonous drug as wine by the hand of human beings. The two illustrations thus point out that just as Divine laws working in the physical world produce the purest and most agreeable diets, separating them from obnoxious elements and useless excrements, so their working in the religious world produces the sublimest moral teachings, which afford to man the purest and most agreeable religious diet. But the best teachings given by Divine revelation are likely to be corrupted by the hands of human beings, as the best of fruits is turned into such a disagreeable and obnoxious thing as wine, though if it had been preserved in its original condition it could have served as an excellent provision.

68 And thy *Rabb* revealed to the bee: Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build,

69 Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of thy *Rabb* submissively. There comes forth from their bellies a beverage of many hues, in which there is healing for men. Therein is surely a sign for a people who reflect.^a

70 And Allâh creates you, then He causes you to die; and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that he knows nothing after having knowledge. Surely Allâh is Knowing, Powerful.^a

69a. This is another illustration to show that Divine revelation brings about an object which cannot be **affected** by human exertions. In this case the Divine laws of nature are shown working in the bee, which gathers the sweet juice of different flowers, making it into honey. What this small creature effects, working instinctively in obedience to Divine laws, cannot be effected by the combined exertions of the whole

of humanity. This illustration from the physical world is introduced to show a similar working of the Divine laws in the spiritual world, viz., that the Prophet, working, as it were, instinctively in obedience to the Divine laws prevailing in the religious world, collects by Divine revelation all that is best and noblest in any religion, and sums it up in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân: a work which could not be effected by human exertion. It should be noted that five kinds of the *wahy* (revelation) of Allâh are mentioned in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân: firstly, a revelation to inanimate objects, as *the earth* (99:5) or *the heavens* (41:12); secondly, a revelation to living creatures other than man, as *the bee*; thirdly, a revelation to the angels (8:12); fourthly, a revelation to men and women other than prophets, as the apostles of 'Îsâ (5:111) or the mother of Mûsâ (28:7); and fifthly, a revelation to prophets and messengers. It should be borne in mind that all these kinds of *wahy* are not identical; as, for instance, in the case of the *bee*, it is its very *instinct* that is a revelation to it. The revelation to the prophets is the expression of Divine will for the guidance of human beings.

70a. As in individuals - so in nations. Those who had been given knowledge of Divine revelation before the Holy Prophet had lost or corrupted it at the time of his advent; hence the necessity for a new Divine revelation.

SECTION 10: The Recipient of Revelation

71 And Allâh has made some of you excel others in the means of subsistence; so those who are made to excel give not away their sustenance to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal therein. Will they then deny the favour of Allâh?^a

72 And Allâh has made wives for you from among yourselves,^a and has given you sons and daughters from your wives, and has provided you with good things. Will they then believe in falsehood and deny the favour of Allâh?^b

73 And they serve besides Allâh that which controls for them no sustenance at all from the *samâwât* and the earth; nor have they any power.

74 So coin not similitudes for Allâh. Surely Allâh knows and you know not.

71a. The verse points to the differences in the physical world and affords an answer to the demand of the disbelievers expressly stated elsewhere: "We will not believe till we are given the like of that which Allâh's messengers are given" (6:124), claiming an equal right with the Prophet to receive Divine revelation. It is, therefore, pointed out

that, as there are differences in the physical world, so there are differences in the religious world. All men are not equally fit to receive the gift of Divine revelation. It is to this that the concluding words of the verse allude; *the favour of Allâh*, which is the *Divine revelation*, should not be denied simply because all men are not equal recipients of it.

72a. The statement made here is that for all men wives are created from their *anfus* (plural of *nafs*, meaning the real essence of a human being); no one ever thinks of placing such an unnatural interpretation upon these words as that which is erroneously placed upon similar words about Âdam, where the *rib* is made to take the place of *nafs*. The words of the Qur'ân do not allow this unnatural interpretation, which is based upon the story of Genesis.

In the words that follow, *hafadah* are mentioned along with *banîn*, or *sons*. *Hafadah* is plural of *hâfid*, which means *one who serves*. But the word *hafadah* has been variously explained as meaning *grandsons*, *daughters*, *sons-in-law* and *servants*. *Daughters* seem to be the most appropriate significance, as being mentioned with *sons*.

72b. They believe in the superstition that the idols, which are inanimate objects, can intercede with Allâh, and deny the favour of Allâh being granted to a human being. Hence the next verse speaks of the idols.

75 Allâh sets forth a parable: There is a slave, the property of another, controlling naught, and there is one to whom We have granted from Ourselves goodly provisions, so he spends from it secretly and openly. Are the two alike?^a Praise be to Allâh! Nay, most of them know not.

76 And Allâh sets forth a parable of two men: One of them dumb, controlling naught, and he is a burden to his master; wherever he sends him, he brings no good. Is he equal with him who enjoins justice, and he is on the right path?^a

SECTION 11: **Punishment withheld**

77 And Allâh's is the unseen of the *samâwât* and the earth. And the matter of the Hour is but as a twinkling of the eye or it is nigher still.^a Surely Allâh is Possessor of power over all things.

75a. By slave is meant the idol-worshipper who, instead of being master of idols, stones, and such-like objects, as Allâh has created him to be, chooses to become a slave to them, bows before them, and considers them more powerful than himself. By the master of the goodly provision from Allâh is meant the recipient of the Divine revelation, i.e., the Prophet. The comparison is introduced to show that the idol-worshippers will ultimately find themselves deprived of all power. The words of the parable find an echo in the reply of Abû Sufyân, when the Holy Prophet, who was entering Makkah as a conqueror, inquired of him: “Has not the time come when thou shouldst know that there is no god but Allâh?” Abû Sufyân replied: “By Allâh! I am now certain that if there had been a god besides Allâh, it would surely have availed me somewhat”.

76a. This parable makes the same comparison as the previous one. The purport is here made clearer. The *master of the goodly provision from Allâh* of the previous verse is here plainly called the *enjoiner of justice and the one who is on the right path*, while the idol-worshipper is the *one who is not able to do anything and who remains unsuccessful in whatever he undertakes* — a prophetic allusion to the defeats and discomfiture of the idolaters.

77a. By *the unseen* is meant *the knowledge of the unseen*, or the knowledge of the eventual fulfilment of the prophecies; and by *the Hour* is meant *the hour of the doom* of the opponents of the Prophet, the hour when their power was to be utterly destroyed.

78 And Allâh brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers — you knew nothing — and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you might give thanks.

79 See they not the birds, constrained in the middle of the sky? None withholds them but Allâh. Surely in this are signs for a people who believe.^a

80 And Allâh has given you an abode in your houses, and He has given you houses of the skins of cattle, which you find light to carry on the day of your march and on the day of your halting, and of their wool and their fur and their hair, household stuff and a provision for a time.

81 And Allâh has made for you, of what He has created, shelters, and He has given you in the mountains, places of retreat, and He has given you garments to save you from the heat,^a and coats of mail to save you in your fighting. Thus does He complete His favour to you that you may submit.^b

79a. The withholding of the birds seems to have a deeper significance. Both Arab proverb and Arab poetry bear witness to *birds* being spoken of as attending a victorious army to feed upon the corpses of the enemy left on the battlefield. Thus we have the well-known Arab proverb ‘*tabaddada bi-lahmi-ka al-tairu*, i.e., *may the birds disperse thy flesh!*’ which is a kind of imprecation, meaning “may the man die and his flesh be dispersed and eaten by birds!” (*Majma‘ al-Amthal*, by Maidânî, Part I). Arab poetry has many references to this, but I cannot quote more than one instance. The famous Nâbighah says: *When he goes out with the army, flocks of birds, being guided by the companies of the army, hover over his head.* Here the birds are made the attendants of a victorious army, as if they knew that the army which they followed would slay the enemy, and that they would thus feed on dead bodies. In withholding the birds, therefore, there may be a reference to withholding the punishment which must ultimately overtake the enemy.

81a. The mention of one of two contrary things always involves the other. Hence by the preservation from heat spoken of here, preservation from heat and cold alike is meant. Or, as *Zajjâj* (Grammarians) says, since what preserves a man from heat also preserves him from cold, the mention of the other is omitted.

81b. As He has given you of the good things of this life, the physical blessings, He now completes these blessings by giving you the greatest of His blessings, i.e., Divine revelation, so that, submitting to it, you may prosper.

82 Then if they turn away, your duty is only clear deliverance (of the message).

83 They recognize the favour of Allâh, yet they deny it, and most of them are ungrateful.

SECTION 12: Prophets testify

84 And on the day when We raise up a witness out of every nation,^a then permission (to offer excuse) will not be given to the disbelievers, nor will they be allowed to make amends.

85 And when the wrongdoers see the chastisement, it will not be lightened for them, nor will they be respited.

86 And when those who ascribed partners (to Allâh) see their associate-deities, they will say: Our *Rabb*, these are our associate-deities on whom we called besides You. But they will throw back at them the word: Surely you are liars.

87 And they will tender submission to Allâh on that day, and what they used to forge will fail them.

84a. In this verse, as well as in the concluding verse (verse 89) of this section, the broad humanitarian doctrine is taught that a prophet has been raised in every nation. A Christian annotator seems to note with some wonder that “this verse seems to necessitate the belief of some true prophet having existed in India, China, Japan, etc.”, but certainly it is much more surprising that those who claim hundreds of prophets for a single nation, like the house of Isrâ’îl, should grudge even a single true prophet to those vast countries and nations. Islâm rejects all such narrow views of the religious providence of Allâh, Who is not the “Lord God of Israel”, but the *Rabb* of all nations.

88 Those who disbelieve and hinder (human beings) from Allâh’s way, We will add chastisement to their chastisement because they made mischief.

16/89 And on the day when We raise up in every people a witness against them from among themselves, and bring you as a witness against these.^a And We have revealed the Book to you explaining all things,^b and a guidance and mercy and good news for those who submit.

SECTION 13: Revelation enjoins Good

90 Surely Allâh enjoins justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion. He admonishes you that you may be mindful.^a

89a. By *these* are meant the Muslim community throughout the world and in all ages.

89b. Brinkman says: “If the Qur’ân explains everything and is a guidance, what need is there for the *Sunnah*?” *Sunnah* means *way* or *practice*, and by *Sunnah* is meant the practice of the Prophet, as illustrating the precepts of the Qur’ân. Moreover, by *everything* is meant every basic principle necessary for the religious welfare of human beings. The *Sunnah* supplies the details.

90a. This verse deals comprehensively with the different degrees of goodness and evil. The lowest form of goodness is that which is called '*adl (justice) or returning good for good*, and includes not only justice proper, but also the fulfilment of all duties and obligations, as they all more or less take the form of doing good for good. A higher degree of goodness is, however, that which is called *ihsân*, or *goodness* proper. It is the doing of good in cases where man has received no benefit. The last stage of goodness is that in which a man's nature is so inclined to good that he has not to make an effort for doing good; he does good to all people as an ordinary man does good to his own kindred. In fact, he looks upon the whole of humanity as his kindred. Similarly, this verse deals with the three degrees of evil, from the merest indecency to the wrongful conduct which violates the rights of individuals and nations. *Fahshâ'* or *indecency* is that which is evil in itself, though it may not affect the rights of others, *anything not agreeable with truth*; *munkar*, what is disapproved, is that which affects the rights of other individuals; and *baghy*, *exceeding the bounds* or *acting tyrannically*, is oppression or rebellion affecting the rights of large numbers, nations or States.

91 And fulfill the covenant of Allâh, when you have made a covenant, and break not the oaths after making them fast, and you have indeed made Allâh your surety. Surely Allâh knows what you do.

92 And be not like her who unravels her yarn, disintegrating it into pieces, after she has spun it strongly.^a You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because (one) nation is more numerous than (another) nation.^b Allâh only tries you by this. And He will certainly make clear to you on the day of Resurrection that wherein you differed.

93 And if Allâh please, He would make you a single nation, but He leaves in error whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases. And certainly you will be questioned as to what you did.

94 And make not your oaths a means of deceit between you, lest a foot should slip after its stability, and you should taste evil because you hinder (human beings) from Allah's way and grievous chastisement be your (lot).

95 And take not a small price for Allâh's covenant. Surely what is with Allâh is better for you, did you but know!

92a. A human being who accepts the truth but does not act according to it is likened to a woman who first spins her yarn and then unravels it. This is sheer madness, but this is the very thing of which most people are guilty. They are united by certain ties, but when this union brings about strength, they destroy it with their own hands. It was unity which made the Muslims rise to great power, but that unity today lies in ruins, and the strong community of Islâm is like the unravelled yarn of a crazy spinner.

92b. Faithfulness to covenants is here stressed and, from the covenant with Allâh, the subject is diverted to the covenants between a human being and a human being. Attention is drawn in the words; *you make your oaths to be means of deceit between you*, to the conditions generally prevailing in the world, to the breach of covenants between nations, which is ruining the stability of human society.

96 What is with you passes away and what is with Allâh is enduring. And We shall certainly give to those who are patient their reward for the best of what they did.

97 Whoever does good, whether male or female,^a and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life, and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did.

98 So when you recite the Qur'ân, seek refuge in Allâh from the accursed *shaitân*.

99 Surely he has no authority over those who believe and rely on their *Rabb*.

100 His authority is only over those who befriend him and those who associate others with Him.

SECTION 14: The Qur'ân is not a Forgery

101 And when We change a message for a message — and Allâh knows best what He reveals — they say: You are only a forger. Nay, most of them know not.^a

97a. The Qur'ân here affords another reply to the ignorant statement made in certain quarters that according to Islâm women have no *nafs*. The promise is twofold: the doers of good, both men and women, are made to lead a good life in this world and will have a reward in the Hereafter.

101a. It is not the change of the Qur'ânic verses that is spoken of here; it is the change of the previous messages sent through former prophets for the message of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. This chapter belongs to Makkah, and the upholders of abrogation

have never asserted that any verse was abrogated while the Holy Prophet was at Makkah. Moreover, the context clearly shows that it was the revelation of the Qur'ân itself that was called a forgery, and not an occasional change that any of its commandments could have undergone, with which change the disbelievers had, in fact, no concern. For a fuller discussion of the doctrine of abrogation, see 2:106a.

102 Say: *Rûḥul-quḍus*^a has revealed it from your *Rabb* with truth that it may establish those who believe, and as a guidance and good news for those who submit.

103 And indeed We know that they say: Only a mortal teaches him. The tongue of him whom they hint at is foreign, and this is clear Arabic language.^a

104 Those who believe not in Allâh's messages, Allâh guides them not, and for them is a painful chastisement.

105 Only they forge lies who believe not in Allâh's messages, and they are the liars.^a

106 Whoso disbelieves in Allâh after his belief — not he who is compelled while his heart is content with faith, but he who opens (his) breast for disbelief — on them is the wrath of Allâh, and for them is a grievous chastisement.^a

102a. The Holy *Rûḥ* is here stated to be the bearer of the revelation to the Holy Prophet, while elsewhere the same bearer is called the *al-Rûḥ al-Amîn*, or the *Faithful Rûḥ* (26:193), and the same is called *Jibrîl* in 2:97.

103a. Various names have been suggested as to the person whom the opponents of the Prophet referred to. These are mostly the names of Christian slaves, Jabr, Yâsir, 'Aish or Ya'îsh, Qais, 'Addâs, who were not Arabs. The name of Salman is suggested by Prideaux, which Sale shows to be an utterly baseless conjecture, as Salman came after the Flight. All these slaves were among the early converts to Islâm, and it was they who were most cruelly persecuted by the Quraish; yet they remained firm under the severest tortures. Is it possible that they, without being in the least gainers, should have thus willingly suffered persecutions for a cause which they knew to be false? This is sufficient to show the absurdity of the allegation, and it is to this that v. 105 refers. The general opinion of the Christians is that it was a Nestorian monk named Sergius, who is identified with the monk Buḥairah, whom the Holy Prophet, while yet a boy, met on his journey to Syria with his uncle Abû Tâlib. The absurdity of this view is also pointed out by Sale. As regards the Christian slaves, they certainly cannot be supposed to have been the authors of the sublime themes of the Arabic Glorious

Qur'ân. That the opponents of the Prophet said so is rather a proof of the falsehood of the assertion than an indication of its truth; for, unable to meet the arguments of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, they had to adopt less honest methods of making the Qur'ân unpopular.

105a. The reference is to the subject-matter of verse 103. The allegation was that certain slaves taught the Prophet. How could a forger of lies be a believer, especially when he had to undergo the severest trials for its sake?

107 That is because they love this world's life more than the Hereafter, and because Allâh guides not the disbelieving people.

108 These are they whose hearts and ears and eyes Allâh has sealed and these are the heedless ones.^a

109 No doubt that in the Hereafter they are the losers.

110 Then surely your *Rabb*, to those who flee after they are persecuted, then struggle hard^a and are patient, surely your *Rabb* after that is Protecting, Merciful.

106a. Only very rare instances are met with in the early history of Islam in which the converts even under compulsion ever recanted. For instance, Yâsir and Sumayyah, husband and wife, suffered death at the hands of the disbelievers because they would not recant, the latter being put to death most cruelly, her legs being tied to two camels which were made to run in opposite directions. Their son 'Ammâr, however, was not so resolute. The cruellest persecutions were inflicted on those slaves who had become converts to Islâm. Muir says: "These were seized and imprisoned, or they were exposed upon the scorching gravel of the valley to the intense glare of the midday sun. The torment was enhanced by intolerable thirst, until the wretched sufferers hardly knew what they said." Yet even under these trying circumstances, which would have maddened even the most resolute man, there were those among these slave-converts who were as firm as a mountain; as in the case of Bilâl, of whom it is recorded that "in the depth of his anguish the persecutors could force from him but one expression, *Aḥad! Aḥad!* (One! One! God)" (Muir).

108a. It is clear from this that Allah does not seal the hearts of men and thus hinder them from accepting the truth; on the other hand, it is they who reject the truth, turning a deaf ear to the preaching of the Prophet, as the previous verses show. Nor

are the hearts sealed for ever, for, as verse 110 shows, even after that Allâh forgives them, if they repent and show perseverance.

110a. It should be noted that the struggle (Arabic *jihad*) spoken of here is certainly not in connection with fighting, for the verse was revealed at Makkah. Note also that Allâh is spoken of here as being Ghafûr, translated as *Protecting*, to those who flee from their homes on account of persecution and then struggle hard to establish Truth. Both these are deeds of sacrifice, highly virtuous deeds, and therefore Allâh's being Ghafûr is in relation to the exaltation of their degrees by protecting them from the commission of sins, not the pardoning of any sins which they may have committed, for it is their acts of sacrifice that are spoken of here, not their sins. For fuller explanation of the word Ghafûr, see 2:286a.

SECTION 15: Fate of the Opponents

111 On the day when every *nafs* will come pleading for itself, and every *nafs* will be paid in full what it has done, and they will not be dealt with unjustly.

112 And Allâh sets forth a parable: A town safe and secure, to which its means of subsistence came in abundance from every quarter; but it disbelieved in Allâh's favours, so Allâh made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought.^a

113 And certainly there came to them a Messenger from among them, but they rejected him, so the chastisement overtook them, while they were wrongdoers.^a

114 So eat of what Allâh has given you, lawful and good (things), and give thanks for Allâh's favour, if He it is you serve.

112a. The parable is set forth to depict the state of Makkah as it was before the time of the Holy Prophet and, prophetically, the fate to which it was to be reduced after he was rejected, *after it disbelieved in Allâh's favours*. Its first condition was one of great prosperity and affluence, being the centre to which all tribes came for pilgrimage and trade, a picture of which is drawn in one of the earlier chapters of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân: "So let them serve the *Rabb* of this House, Who feeds them against hunger, and gives them security against fear" (106:3, 4). When the Prophet and his followers were persecuted and tortured, the Prophet prayed thus: "O Allâh, overtake them with seven (years of famine) like Yûsuf's seven (years of famine). So a famine overtook

them, which destroyed everything, till they ate skins and dead animals and one of them looked to samâ' and he saw smoke on account of hunger" (Bukhârî 15:2). This was the *libâs al-jû'* or the *pall of hunger*, spoken of here. But, even then, they did not stop persecution and tried to exterminate Islâm by the sword. The result was that all their attacks on Madînah failed, and ultimately Makkah itself lay powerless when attacked by the Prophet. This was the *libâs al-khauf*, or *pall of fear*, being so called because no blood was shed. The word *libâs* (lit., *covering*) used in connection with hunger and fear indicates the utmost degree of hunger and fear, which, as it were, covered them all over.

113a. This makes the prophecy indicated in the previous parable clear. The chastisement spoken of here is the chastisement of hunger and fear spoken of in the previous verse.

115 He has forbidden you only what dies of itself and blood and the flesh of swine and that over which any other name than that of Allâh has been invoked; but whoever is driven to (it), not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.^a

116 And utter not, for what your tongues describe, the lie: This is lawful and this unlawful; so that you forge a lie against Allâh. Surely those who forge a lie against Allâh will not prosper.

117 A little enjoyment — and for them is a painful chastisement.

118 And to those who became Jews We prohibited what We have related to you already,^a and We did them no wrong, but they wronged themselves.

119 And surely you're *Rabb*, for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn after that and make amends, surely your *Rabb* after that is Forgiving, Merciful.

SECTION 16: The Way to Greatness

120 Surely Ibrâhîm was a model (of virtue),^a obedient to Allâh, upright, and he was not of the polytheists,

121 Grateful for His favours. He chose him and guided him on the right path.

115a. See 2:173a and 6:145a; also 5:3.

118a. See 6:146, 146a. This shows that ch. 6 was revealed before chapter 16.

120a. *Ummat* means originally *a way, course or mode of acting, a nation or a community*, but it also signifies *a righteous man who is an object of imitation, one who is known for goodness, a man combining all kinds of good qualities, one who has no equal* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

122 And We gave him good in this world; and in the Hereafter he is surely among the righteous.

123 Then We revealed to you: Follow the *millah* (the way as Allâh dictated or the creed) of Ibrâhîm, the upright one; and he was not of the polytheists.

124 The Sabbath was ordained only against those who differed about it.^a And surely thy *Rabb* will judge between them on the day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed.

125 Call to the way of your *Rabb* with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner.^a Surely your *Rabb* knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright.

126 And if you take your turn, then punish with the like of that with which you were afflicted.^a But if you show patience, it is certainly best for the patient.

124a. The word '*alâ*' sometimes carries the significance of *against*, and the meaning here seems to be that the Sabbath, the Jewish day of worship which should have made them walk in the footsteps of righteous Ibrâhîm, was turned against them because of their violation of it, because they differed about it and did not observe it as a day of Divine worship. Or, the statement is made to show that it was not necessary for the Muslims to observe a day of worship, as even Ibrâhîm, a model of virtue for both the Jews and the Muslims, did not observe a particular day of worship, while the very people who were required to observe it, the Jews, violated the commandment.

125a. The principle laid down for preaching and religious controversy by the "unlearned Arabian" has yet to be learned by the most advanced people, whose controversies are carried on with no other object than that of fault-finding, and whose preaching only aims at carping at others. It shows the breadth of mind of the Holy Prophet, more especially when it is remembered that the injunction was given at a time when the Muslims were being most severely persecuted and there was the greatest reason for adopting a harsh attitude.

126a. There is a prophecy in the words *if you take your turn*. The Muslims were being persecuted most cruelly, and they were told that the time would come when they would dominate their erstwhile persecutors. In that case they are allowed to punish them for their guilt, but it is twice added, here and in verse 127, that they should show patience when they had the upper hand and do good even to their enemies, for Allah is with those who do good (verse 128).

127 And be patient and thy patience is not but by (the help of) Allâh, and grieve not for them, nor be in distress for what they plan.

128 Surely Allâh is with those who keep their duty and those who do good (to others).